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Members of the England team inspect the surface | BCCI | P28

FINAL STEP TO WTC FINAL

Will it be a turner? Who will India bring in? Will hosts make it to the summit clash? Questions aplenty as 4th Test begins | PTI

LOTS AT STAKE

India have proved that the first Test loss was a blip. Having recovered in convincing fashion, now the onus in on finishing the job. If they avoid defeat, they will advance to WTC Final in June

ROHIT WATCH

Even if the last two Tests were poor for most batsmen, Rohit Sharma will beg to disagree. With a 161 and 66 in the last two Tests, the opener has led the way for India in the batting department

PITCH TALK

With the last two Tests favouring spin excessively, there will be a lot of attention on the 22 yards. If initial reports coming out of Ahmedabad is to be believed, it is going to turn again rather early

UMESH LIKELY

Hosts will be pressed into at least one forced change. And that could be pace bowler Umesh Yadav, who has recovered from his calf injury. But expect them to play three spinners

28

THE NUMBER OF WICKETS SPINNERS OF BOTH TEAMS TOOK IN 3RD TEST

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARWAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • WARANGAL • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

STUNG BY SLEAZEGATE, JARKIHOLI QUITS CABINET

Seeks inquiry into episode after allegations that he sexually exploited a woman job-seeker

BANSY KALAPPA @ Bengaluru

A day after purported sleaze videos of Water Resources Minister Ramesh Jarkiholi surfaced, he resigned from the council of ministers on Wednesday, owning moral responsibility.

In a four-line resignation letter, addressed to Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa, Jarkiholi claimed that he was innocent, but said he was tendering his resignation so that he could come clean. He also sought an immediate inquiry into the episode. The CM forwarded the resignation to Governor Vajubhai Vala who "accepted the recommendation under Section 164 (1) of the Constitution."

Soon after the scandal broke out, BJP national general secretary in charge of Karnataka, Arun Singh, is said to have communicated the party's decision to the state leadership, keeping in mind the upcoming Assembly polls in five states, and also the Assembly and Lok Sabha bypolls and panchayat elections in the state.

The allegation, just ahead of the Budget session of the state legislature, starting Thursday, had come as a huge embarrassment for the B S Yediyurappa-led BJP government. The Opposition Congress and JD(S) had demanded Jarkiholi's immediate resignation. Opposition leader Siddaramaiah even said, "An FIR should be registered and the matter investigated."

Ramesh Jarkiholi, who was one of the main architects in propping up the BJP government by resigning from the Congress along with 17 other MLAs, had on Tuesday maintained that he was innocent and would not resign. He was accused of sexually exploiting a woman, who had approached him seeking a job, multiple times. An RTI activist, Dinesh Kallahalli, had even complained to Bengaluru City Police Commissioner Kamal Pant that her life was in danger.

It is widely believed that the woman had originally met Jarkiholi seeking permission to fly drones over reservoirs in Karnataka for a documentary on the achievements of the department and the minister. Later on, he had reportedly promised her a job in Karnataka Power Transmission Corporation Ltd. MORE REPORTS: P4

Members of Aam Aadmi Party hold a protest demanding the dismissal of Gokak MLA Ramesh Jarkiholi over an alleged sleaze video scandal, in Bengaluru on Wednesday | MEGHANA SASTRY

VIOLENCE ERUPTS IN GOKAK AFTER RESIGNATION

Violence broke out in Gokak, the constituency of Ramesh Jarkiholi, on Wednesday after news of his resignation from the Yediyurappa Cabinet spread around the town. P4

It all started with shoot request for a docu-film...

BANSY KALAPPA @ Bengaluru

VIDHANA Soudha officials claimed that they had seen the mystery woman who is seen in the sleaze video with MLA Ramesh Jarkiholi, over a period of at least eight months especially in the chamber of Jarkiholi himself, when he was the Water Resources Minister.

On several occasions, she was seen interacting with Soudha staff, claiming to be a documentary filmmaker interested in bringing out a documentary on the state of reservoirs. Jarkiholi had even introduced her to senior officials as someone interested in shooting the documentary, they said. FULL REPORT: P4

RTI ACTIVIST RECEIVES THREAT CALLS

A day after filing a petition before Bengaluru city police over MLA Ramesh Jarakaholi's alleged sex videos, RTI activist Dinesh Kallahalli claimed he has been receiving threat calls from unknown persons. He filed a complaint with Ramanagara police on Tuesday, saying he has received four such calls, threatening him of dire consequences. P4

INSIDE ▸▸ 5 MINISTERS HAD TO PAY THE PRICE IN THE LAST DECADE | HDK: IS THIS RAMA RAJYA YOU WANTED TO USHER IN? P4

Covaxin anxiety ends with phase-3 efficacy at 81 pc

ADDITIONAL ANALYSIS

Bharat Biotech is planning an additional interim analysis for 87 cases, and the final analysis is planned for 130 cases. All data from the analyses will be shared via pre-publication servers as well as submitted to a peer-reviewed journal

COVISHIELD WORKS FASTER ON INFECTED

The first-ever data on the effectiveness of Covid-19 vaccine Covishield in India has shown that it not only works faster in people already infected but is also highly effective in those without antibodies against the virus after the 28 days of the first dose. As part of the study, researchers measured antibodies to SARS-CoV-2 directed against the spike protein in a group of 135 vaccinated healthcare workers DETAILS: P8

SUMI SUKANYA DUTTA @ New Delhi

INDIA's first homegrown Covid-19 vaccine Covaxin has been found to be nearly 81 % effective in preventing infection, an interim analysis of data from the vaccine's phase-3 clinical trial in 25,800 volunteers has shown.

The first interim analysis is based on 43 cases of Covid-19, of which 36 were observed in the placebo group and seven in the vaccine group, resulting in a point estimate of vaccine efficacy of 80.6%, said Bharat Biotech, which developed the vaccine along with the Indian Council of Medical Research.

The phase-3 study enrolled 25,800 participants between 18-98 years of age, including 2,433 over the age of 60 and 4,500 with comorbidities. This is a significant result considering Covaxin is already being used in the country's massive Covid-19 vaccination drive, which in addition to healthcare and frontline workers, now also covers senior citizens and people above 45 with serious ailments.

Sources said the data safety monitoring board of the trial unblinded the study only on Wednesday afternoon and details such as how many severe cases of the disease were reported in the two groups are now being analysed. Covaxin had received restricted use authorisation, along with Serum Institute of India's Covishield in January after which the first phase of vaccination was started. The permission granted by the country's apex drug regulator without efficacy data had triggered massive criticism and resulted in slow acceptance of the vaccine in many states.

Krishna Ella, CMD of Bharat Biotech said the vaccine, in addition to demonstrating high clinical efficacy, has also shown significant immunogenicity against the rapidly emerging variants of Covid-19.

People should now be offered a choice of vaccine, feel experts

CHETANA BELAGERE @ Bengaluru

WITH Bharat Biotech, the maker of India's indigenous vaccine Covaxin, announcing its interim Phase-3 trial data on Wednesday, experts and the scientific community who have been eagerly waiting for the publication of the data, now say that the government should consider giving a choice to people between the two available vaccines — Covishield and Covaxin.

"In any ideal situation, the government should give a choice of vaccination and vaccine. Now, the company is saying the vaccine has 81 per cent efficacy. We are waiting for the data to come out in public domain," said Head and Neck Oncologist Dr Vishal Rao, who had written to the Health Ministry after emergency use approvals were given for both Covishield and Covaxin.

Interestingly, virologists and health experts claim that they would prefer taking Covaxin over Covishield for various scientific reasons.

While the Union Health Ministry has clarified recently that no AEFI (adverse events following immunisation) deaths had occurred due to the vaccines, it may be noted that of those who died in many states after being administered the vaccine were given Covishield.

Also, the data released by the Health Ministry in mid-February showed that the proportion of AEFIs by Covishield has exceeded that for Covaxin.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Health Minister Dr Harsh Vardhan, External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, Tamil Nadu Health Minister C Vijayabaskar and many other leaders have been administered Covaxin.

CONTINUED ON: P7

DEMOCRACY SCALE

US think-tank report downgrades India as 'partly free'

BALA CHAUHAN @ Bengaluru

IN an extremely damaging assessment by Freedom House, a Washington-based 'pro-democracy and civil liberties' think-tank, India has been rated as "Partly Free" in its 'Freedom in the World 2021' report, which has just been made public. Kashmir, which India maintains is an integral part of the country, has been ranked separately as 'Indian Kashmir' and 'Pakistan Kashmir' as "territory as opposed to a country" in the controversial report.

The Freedom Report 2021 has dropped India's score from last year's 71/100, when they had rated the country as "Free", to 67/100 and "Partly Free" in this year's report. While the score on political rights in the world's largest democracy remained constant at 34/40 in both years, the rating in civil liberties has gone down from last year's 37/60 to 33/60 this year. In 2019, India had scored 75.

The report, titled 'Democracy under Siege', alleged that Indian Government and its state-level allies "continued to crack down on critics during the year, and their response to Covid-19 included a ham-fisted lockdown that resulted in the dangerous and unplanned displacement of millions of internal migrant workers."

'Freedom in the World' is an annual global report on political rights and civil liberties. This year's report has covered 195 countries and 15 territories between January 1, 2020 and December 31, 2020 on 25 markers that evaluate the health of the country's democracy. The organisation has ranked countries as "Free," "Partly Free," or "Not Free", based on their performance on those indicators. Of the 195 independent countries that have been evaluated, only 28 have been given positive growth ratings. P9

BSY Cabinet okays 3-member panel on quota, looks to buy time

ANUSHA RAVI @ Bengaluru

FINDING itself in a fix with at least half a dozen communities demanding an increase in reservation or re-categorisation for higher reservation, the B S Yediyurappa Cabinet on Wednesday decided to set up a three-member committee to study all such demands.

Home Minister Basavaraj Bommai, who also holds the Law and Parliamentary Affairs portfolio, told reporters that the high-level committee will be headed by a retired High Court judge and will guide the government on accommodating changes in reservation status within the legal and Constitutional framework. With this committee, the cabinet hopes to get a breather from the continuous pressure being exerted on the BJP government by various communities, religious seers and ministers supporting such quota agitations.

Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa arrives for the cabinet meeting at Vidhana Soudha on Wednesday | VIKAS KUMAR T

"If the demands of all the communities are considered, then the total reservation will exceed 50 per cent. The Supreme Court's Constitution bench in the Indra Sawhney case has ruled that reservation should not exceed 50 per cent. In case it needs to, then special criteria should be identified. The SC has either stayed or altogether rejected some states' attempts to increase reservation by more than 50 per cent. We need legal and Constitutional guidance while accommodating these requests, "Bommai said while explaining the role of the committee.

CONTINUED ON: P7

EXPRESS READ

Sasikala quits politics ahead of TN polls

Chennai: Weeks ahead of the Tamil Nadu Assembly elections, V K Sasikala, expelled AIADMK leader and close aide of late Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa, on Wednesday announced that "she will stay away from politics", but would pray for the "golden rule" of the late party supremo. P7

Myanmar forces kill 33 protesters: Reports

Yangon: Myanmar security forces dramatically escalated their crackdown on protests against last month's coup, killing at least 33 protesters on Wednesday across several cities, according to accounts on social media and local news reports compiled by a data analyst. PTI

Insurance brokers now under ambit of ombudsman

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ New Delhi

IF your insurance policy broker's service is not satisfactory, you can now approach an ombudsman to seek redressal. For, the insurance ombudsman rules have just been throughly amended to bring brokers under its ambit.

You can lodge your complaint against your insurance broker online. They can now be penalised for deficiency in service.

The amended rules have enlarged the scope of complaints to the ombudsman to include disputes pertaining to deficiencies in service on the part of insurers, agents, brokers and other intermediaries.

"Insurance brokers have been brought within the ambit of the ombudsman mechanism, by empowering the ombudsman to pass awards against insurance brokers," the Union finance ministry said in its statement on Wednesday.

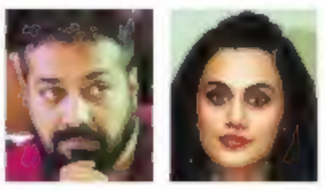
A complaints management system will be created to enable policyholders track the status of their complaints online. The ombudsman can use video conferencing for hearings. The government notified amendments to the Insurance ombudsman Rules, 2017 on March 2.

Vocal celebs Anurag and Taapsee face I-T dept heat

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Mumbai/New Delhi

In what was seen as a vindictive action against vocal celebs criticising the government, the Income Tax department on Wednesday raided 30 properties linked to actor Taapsee Pannu, filmmaker Anurag Kashyap and his co-promoters in the now-dissolved Phantom Films in Pune and Mumbai. Both were questioned in Pune over alleged tax evasion, IT officials said.

Searches were conducted on the premises linked to Phantom Films, a production house co-promoted by Anurag Kashyap, Vikas Bahl and Madhu Mantena. Exceed Entertainment, a talent house that manages actor Saif Ali Khan, was also raided. Also, some executives of Kwan Talent Management, which handles actor Deepika Padukone's account,



were questioned.

"The search will continue for the next couple of days to check the veracity of the submitted documents and actual income. Interlinked transactions are also being probed," I-T department sources said.

The ruling Maha Vikas Aghadi slammed the raids, saying the Centre was suppressing dissenting voices. Anurag and Taapsee are known critics of the BJP-led Centre. Taapsee had recently lashed out at a section of celebrities supporting the government after a Twitter post by pop singer Rihanna on the farmers' agitation.